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ABSTRACT

Only the approach that integrates a study of both the "what" and the "how" of a discipline will be relevant to the practicing English teacher. Missing between the two extremes of specialized subject matter research and conventional educational research is research into the structure of a particular discipline, exploring it as a body of knowledge, traditions, procedures, and attitudes to be taught. Subject materials in English often dictate by their very nature a strategy, perspective, or method for teaching them. For example, the inherent logic of their respective disciplines indicates that (1) grammar should be taught systematically and cumulatively, (2) language usage should be studied through an analysis of items possessing social or stylistical significance, and (3) literary history requires a thematic, comparative, and synoptic approach rather than a miscellaneous and segmental one. (JB)

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Subject-Matter Determines Method

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AMONG the various party lines that divide the American intellectual community, the split between "subject-matter" and "methods" people in education has long been one of the most tedious and unproductive. Especially in the humanities, communication between the two factions has long been fitful and just barely polite. Only recently has there been a growing realization that some of our most important professional responsibilities, such as teacher preparation, cannot be adequately performed until subject-matter and methods teachers learn to work together.

What accounts for the original split can be easily seen, though perhaps less easily cured. The typical college teacher in one of the traditional academic disciplines is himself likely to have had a college experience where emphasis was on "covering the material." His professional career is likely to be hitched to the star of *research;* the ultimate test of his professional respectability is publication, his ability to discuss his specialty, not with his students, but with an often minuscule number of his intellectual peers. He is likely to assert that great teaching is not possible without vital scholarship, without specifying too closely what makes scholarship vital or whether such scholarship is a sufficient or merely a contingent cause.

In the typical community of academicians, there is a polite assumption that everyone will develop a teaching style to suit his personality. Discussions about teaching are likely to be cut short with the announcement that "teaching is an art." *Art* here apparently does not mean what the term meant to such Renaissance humanists as Castiglione, Sidney, and Ben Jonson: man's attempt to improve on nature; the exercise of skill that becomes *second* nature through constant study and practice; the channeling and developing of man's creative abilities through forethought, frequent reconsideration, and the steady exercise of judgment. Rather, *art* here means something more reassuringly and flatteringly Romantic: the idea that, in the natural talent, capacity will flower forth more or less spontaneously, growing organically like the lilies in the field. In practice, this attitude leads to a familiar result: almost exclusive preoccupation with a teacher's knowledge of his academic specialty, with no systematic attempt to nurture teaching ability or to understand its ingredients.

At the opposite extreme, we encounter the educational psychologist, starting from radically different premises, and proceeding along an entirely different tangent. The kind of educational psychologist that the subject-matter specialist is most likely to encounter brings to the

TE 001 101

problem of how to teach such large abstractions as "the learning process." Seldom do these abstractions have the appearance of having been built up empirically and inductively. In other words, the English teacher is seldom told: This is a common element I have discovered in what goes on in a class in transformational grammar, in a seminar in eighteenth-century poetry, and in a class in driver education. Rather, the teacher often has the uncomfortable feeling that educational principles are brought to his subject-matter ready-made, *from the outside*. Sometimes these principles have the abruptness of dogma, as in the behaviorist's commandment: Thou shalt condition overt, measurable behavior. Sometimes they seem to be based on observations far removed from the teacher's own tasks. There may be a lesson, for the student struggling to write an honest sentence, in the behavior of the laboratory pigeon trying to earn its keep.* And again there may not be.

There is obviously great variation in how and how fully the specialist in English methods brings educational psychology to bear in teaching teachers how to structure and conduct their teaching. The more he is indebted to general learning theory, the more the subject-matter person is likely to suspect him of insufficient loyalty to the special problems, the traditional commitments, and the inherent configurations of the teacher's academic discipline. Certainly, today's methods teacher faces a formidable task of keeping fully in touch with subject-matter developments while at the same time attending to his responsibilities in the areas of learning theory and teaching methodology. For instance, there are still people, and books, purporting to help educate English teachers, who dismiss with a few snide remarks the last two centuries of linguistic scholarship. As this body of scholarship is making its influence felt on the teaching of English in school and college, it is putting many questions about motivation, sequence, and approach in a completely new light. Other academic subjects are undergoing similar revolutionary changes. Teachers caught up in these changes will look for experts in methods who can address themselves confidently to the specific problems of the new curricula.

Needed: Scholarship *and* a Commitment to Teaching

It is here that the interests of the subject-matter specialist and of the expert in educational method inevitably meet. In the years ahead, what will be urgently needed in such areas as English, physics, or mathematics are people who combine a strong interest in academic scholarship with a strong commitment to *teaching*—representatives of a type whose virtues are often celebrated but whose survival, let alone increase, little is done to encourage. One specific question that such people must address themselves to is to what extent *subject-matter determines method*. What are basic considerations concerning approach, sequence, motivation, and measurement, *inherent in the nature and structure of the specific subject-matter*, that the curriculum builder or the textbook author ignores at his peril? How must basic assumptions about method vary even *within* a major discipline, as the English teacher, for instance, deals with such fundamentally different areas as spelling, grammar, usage, semantics, expository writing, creative writing, and the study of imaginative literature?

To illustrate the kind of inquiry here possible, I should like to use a few concrete examples from the reorganization of the English curriculum that is taking place as the "New English" slowly makes its way into the classrooms of school and college. One basic decision that every English teacher must make is whether to teach various language skills in combination, or whether to concentrate more or less on one at a time. For instance, should he prepare a solid sequence of thirty les-

sons in "straight" grammar? Or should he take up grammatical problems "as they come up in the student's writing"? Or should he integrate attention to grammar with the reading and interpretation of literature? In the recent past, people in English education or in English methods have often decided this question in favor of the integrated program. For the high schools, for instance, many have recommended a "unit"-approach whose focus of interest is in a central theme, such as "Back-Country America" or "Communication in Our Town." Various kinds of language skills are then "brought in" during the course of unit. Language is thus being used with a purpose. In the words of the secondary school volume on curriculum of the National Council of Teachers of English, "the day is past when English programs were organized with one term of writing, one term of literature, and one term of speech." Through the unit method of teaching, which "recognizes the relatedness of all the language skills and literature," students "have opportunity for practicing many forms of speech and writing with direct attention to these skills as the need arises." (*The English Language Arts in the Secondary School*, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1956, pp. 68-70.)

As materials from applied English linguistics increasingly find their way into the classroom, some drastic rethinking of the assumptions behind the integrated approach is becoming necessary. In the first place, linguists have long objected to the teacher's tendency to blur the distinctions between such different objects of language study as grammar, usage, and meaning. Grammar deals with the *structure* of language; it tells us, for instance, that "the boy lovable Russian young astronaut" is *not* grammatically possible, but that "the lovable young Russian boy astronaut" is. Usage deals with the appropriateness and acceptability of roughly alternative ways of saying the same thing; it tells us what a prospective employer might think if during the interview we say, "Ain't that the truth." The linguist is likely to complain that by always rushing headlong into questions of usage, with its immediate practical application, the teacher gives the student a badly lopsided view of what language actually is and how it actually works. The remedy prescribed by the linguist is predictably that we should separate the study of grammar and usage and, particularly, study the former as a subject in its own right.

Furthermore, by the study of grammar in its own right the linguist does not mean an occasional class hour set aside for the discussion of "grammatical problems." He means the sustained, systematic, cumulative study without which the study of grammar – like the study of mathematics, for instance – remains mere misleading dabbling. Though linguists disagree on many things, they agree that first and last language is a *system*. The student needs to acquire a feeling for how – step by step, and by quite "regular" but increasingly complex operations – a mature sophisticated sentence is constructed from a few simple building blocks. If he is to convey this feeling to the student, the teacher himself must have a firm understanding of what is elementary and what is more complex, what is typical and what is a variation. He must realize that before he can meaningfully discuss a participle used to modify a noun, as in "the *dancing* leaves," he must have built up some understanding of such modifiers as adjectives and of the normal role of *dance* when used as a verb. Often he will find that something he decided to skip during the early stages of instruction will come back to haunt him when he *needs* it to help him explain a more complex item.

Search for the Pattern

Such systematic, cumulative instruction can tap a source of motivation often denied to an integrated approach. As re-

lationships become clear, as the major outlines of a subject emerge, the student can begin to say to himself: "Ah! Now I see. Before, all this seemed always miscellaneous, confusing, one thing after another. But now it begins to hang together. It is beginning to make *sense*." One of the most basic human motives—shared by scientists, artists, dogmatists, authoritarians, and the majority of American voters—is to find the simple pattern underlying the bewildering flow of experience. One thing that modern linguistics encourages the teacher to do is to mobilize the rage for order, the search for the pattern, in the study of language.

The aim of instruction in grammar, according to the linguist, is to give the student at least an elementary grasp of the intricate workings of his own language. As he can be made to grasp the structure of a sentence like "The lady wrote a letter," so he can be made to grasp the structure of a sentence like

> The peppery young lady from Vermont who had been denied admission wrote a letter to the dean telling him what she thought of his —— —— —— school.

However, such a sentence is a finely attuned mechanism of intermeshing parts. The kind of trained perception that can take in the structure of this sentence as a whole does not result from bits and snatches of grammatical instruction improvised by a teacher in a unit focused on non-grammatical concerns. The kind of student who can analyze this sentence is the one who has systematically studied the role of such basic grammatical devices as word order, word forms, and function words; the various basic sentence skeletons; the various possible layers of modification and subordination; the possibilities of substitution.

Several influences are now at work to *help* make such a program of study a truly cumulative sequence rather than a mere miscellaneous inventory. First, the transformational grammarians, led by such men as Noam Chomsky and R. B. Lees, have strongly attacked any lingering notion that the grammarian is a mere registrar of often unrelated linguistic facts. To them, the heart of grammatical study is the account of the successive "transformations" by which complex structures are generated from a small inventory of simple ones. Such successive transformations must be applied in a rigidly predetermined *order* if they are to produce the right results. Obviously, there are possible implications here for the classroom teacher trying to decide what elements in the study of grammar "logically" precede other elements. For instance, let us assume that we want a student to be able to turn a simple statement in the active voice, such as "The man felled the tree," into a question in the passive voice. Obviously it would be a mistake to turn it into a question *first*, since we would get "Did the man fell the tree?" This *did* would have to be gotten rid of again, since the desired final result is "Was the tree felled by the man?" The most *direct* route to this result would be to turn the statement into a passive statement first: "The tree was felled by the man." To get the question, we would then simply reverse the order of the auxiliary and the subject. Elsewhere, in the study of modifiers, treatment of the passive is needed before the use of the past participle as a modifier can be made clear (as in the *felled* tree"). This repeated "transformational" priority of the passive might decide the teacher to treat the passive as something relatively basic and elementary in his treatment of grammar.

A second current influence, reinforcing the grammar teacher's concern with the systematic building up of relationships, is programmed instruction. Here we have a case in which a specific teaching technique, inspired by developments in learning theory, in important ways parallels and reinforces considerations derived from the scholarly re-examination of a given subject-matter. Since programmed teaching aims at making the student learn

by making him take one limited step at a time, it shows up more drastically than any other technique the gaps, the non-sequiturs, the missing premises, in much conventional instruction. The teacher who studies the problems encountered by the programmer (and solved by the good one) can learn a lesson that should be mastered by every textbook author who submits a manuscript to a publisher. That lesson is concerned with how to build a foundation. and how to build *on* that foundation, patiently and systematically—rather than to plant a solid roof firmly in mid-air.

Method Must Accord with Structure

In the teaching of grammar, to sum up, the most immediate present problem of teacher and textbook author is to develop a method that is in accord with the *structure of his subject-matter*. As the English teacher moves on to the problem of usage, he finds that his central problem is one of *strategy in shaping the student's attitudes*. For many decades, teaching usage meant giving "firm" instructions on how to split various kinds of hairs, making "authoritative" pronouncements based on mere unexamined hearsay, and heaping scorn on people who used the English language the way they had learned it at their mother's knee. It often meant red-pencilling the student's compositions for "errors," real and imaginary. It meant an obsessive overemphasis on minor and debatable points of linguistic etiquette, with an often disastrous neglect of one of the English teacher's most crucial tasks—to develop the student's fluency, vigor, resourcefulness, honesty, and responsibility in speech and writing. The teacher who tries to fight this tradition faces formidable opposition. The fashionable oracles of pseudo-sophistication continue to dominate the pages of periodicals whose editors should know better. Crudely unscholarly discussions of usage are given prominent space in a journal that uses the term *scholar* as part of its title; crudely uneducational attacks on modern students of usage appear with tiresome regularity in a review that prides itself on its interest in education. Firmly entrenched traditional textbooks in high school and college, though increasingly assuming a protective liberal coloration, continue to miseducate thousands of young Americans.

What is the teacher of usage to do? What method is he to follow in the classroom? He will soon find it utterly futile to inveigh dogmatically against dogma, to pit his own authoritarian say-so against the say-so of other self-styled authorities. He will soon learn to save his spluttering anger and frustration for a talk at a professional conference or an article in a professional journal. He is likely to choose an approach that stresses heavily the student's own *personal observation*, his own exploration of his linguistic environment, and of his linguistic heritage. Let us assume the question arises whether "the reason is *because*" is "correct," or whether it should be "the reason is *that*" instead. More effective than any argument will be a look at a famous sentence:

> The practical *reason why*, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule is not *because* they are most likely to be in the right, nor *because* this seems fairest to the minority, but *becau*[illegible]*hey* are physically the strongest.

This sentence was not written by a man using "the speech forms of the lower classes," or "untrained to perceive accurate logical distinctions," or, for the moment, forgetful of "the rules of grammar." It was written by Henry David Thoreau, one of the great masters and "sentence-builders" of American prose; and it employs the expression "the reason is because" because it is vigorous, idiomatic, literate American English.

In practice, this approach means that the study of usage will be *un*systematic

when compared, say, with the teaching of grammar. There will be much study of actual passages *for what they will yield.* In an area that used to be dominated by subjective preference and ulterior motives, it is salutary to cultivate the kind of objectivity that involves a willingness to find out, to follow one's information to where it will lead. Where grammar deals with basic recurrent relations, usage deals with often unrelated *items* that for one reason or another have acquired social or stylistic significance. This does not mean that instruction in usage will be completely unstructured. It merely means that sequence (for instance from nonstandard through informal to formal usage) is less crucial than the spirit in which inquiry is conducted. Once the student becomes convinced that he must develop his ear for stylistic nuance, many of his everyday encounters with language can contribute to his growing linguistic sophistication.

Not only will the teacher's treatment of usage be less rigorously systematic than his treatment of grammar, it will also be less independent and self-contained, being more clearly the kind of thing that should be taught in conjunction with something else, something that puts it in its true perspective. The English teacher must convince his students (and the public) that he has more important things to worry about than the use of *like* as a conjunction. In dealing with a piece of writing, his first interest is in its substance and structure and strategy, the way it reveals the purposes and the personality of the writer. Discussion, say, of slang terms used by a writer is meaningful only when they are seen in the context of his intentions, his general sophistication, his audience. If his use of *like* as a conjunction is discussed at all, it should be discussed by way of a footnote to something that really matters. This kind of de-emphasis of usage has obvious implications for the teacher's standards and procedures of evaluation. It rules out theme-grading standards that make the teacher fail a substantial, honest, and vigorously written paper because of a sentence fragment. It rules out reliance on tests that equate "effective English" with a conservative use of *who* and *whom.*

It could be shown that in each major area of English the substance and the method of instruction are similarly interrelated. For a last illustration, I should like to turn to the teaching of literary history. This is a subject-matter that strikes the beholder first of all by its tremendous bulk and formlessness. Not only is the extent of the primary sources staggering, but the variety of approach and interests in the secondary scholarship is truly enormous. By the time the future high school or college English teacher leaves graduate school, he has typically accumulated a dumbfounding array of facts, terms, and theories: biographical and bibliographical, textual and critical, historical and anecdotal, philosophical and belletristic, classical and Romantic, Freudian and Jungian, and you-name-it-we've-got-it.

The person interested in the effective *teaching* of literary history is likely to ask: What standards of relevance and significance apply in this area? What patterns of organization are appropriate? The answers implied in conventional practice are familiar: A line of inquiry is relevant if a tenured professor is giving his valuable time to it; a finding is significant if it achieves publication in a scholarly journal. The appropriate organization is to divide the material chronologically into segments of half a century or more, in short, into "period" courses. Whatever the convenience of this prevailing system, it has one familiar defect: The student at the end may *know* a great deal but *understand* relatively little of it. The fragmentation and specialization encouraged by the period-course pattern interferes with a full grasp of the larger relations, the recurrent problems, the basic dilemmas of literary history; it keeps the various parts of the student's literary

studies from illuminating each other. Like their teachers, such students too often are deficient in their sense of "the presence of the past"; they find it hard to put into practice the requirement that literary scholarship should distinguish itself "from antiquarianism by insisting upon critical evaluation of things recovered, and of seeing present relevance in them." (George Winchester Stone, Jr., *PMLA* 73 [December 1958], Part 2, 82-83.)

New Method to Teach Literary History

Many of the patterns of continuity, reaction and counterreaction, similarity and contrast, that are most revealing to the student cut across the arbitrary limits of the period course. What is needed is a method that will supplement the conventional, segmented historical approach, that will provide a catalyst for the knowledge the student has acquired. Such a method would combine features of a number of available alternatives. First, the teacher would take his clue from some of the familiar studies of great literary themes, such as Arthur O. Lovejoy's study of the theme of cosmic order in *The Great Chain of Being*, or C. S. Lewis's study of the convention of courtly love in *The Allegory in Love*. To understand the role of woman in an Ibsen play, or the function of Chaucer's Pandar, or Lady Chatterley's relationship with her lover, or the ironies in the love poems of Donne, or the elaborate games Shakespeare's comic heroines play with their suitors, the student needs some understanding of the tradition of Romantic love that C. S. Lewis traced from eleventh-century France to Renaissance England, and that profoundly conditions the nature of our social mores to this day. It is hard to see, for instance, how one could meaningfully discuss the taciturnity about love of a Hemingway hero unless one is prepared to relate it to the hero's revolt against the need to repeat yet once more the hyperbolical phrases first taught our civilization by the Provençal poets.

Another such inter-period and cross-period approach is that of "comparative" studies in literature. Typically establishing relations between works from two major Western literatures, they can again help the teacher focus on crucial recurrent themes. Further, they help us take the discussion of form and style out of a narrowly parochial context, making us compare, for instance, the role of the grotesque in Dickens and in Kafka, or the forms of the Romantic lyric in England and France.

The third major approach that cuts across rigid chronological barriers is the "synoptic" approach encouraged by various developments in contemporary literary theory. Modern critics from Kenneth Burke to Northrop Frye have assumed that literature is concerned with certain recurrent concerns, that it deals with them through certain recurrent modes. A study of *Oedipus Rex* sheds light not only on a particular literary culture but also helps to show what literature is and does *per se*. Though it is revealing to study Chaucer in close conjunction with his immediate contemporaries, it is even more revealing to compare his handling of the comic mode with the way it is handled by Fielding, four centuries later. Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* is a great seventeenth-century document, but the logic of any *formal* study of literature requires that it be somehow or somewhere brought in conjunction with a work like Cardinal Newman's nineteenth-century *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Such familiar cruxes of literary criticism as the definition of classic and Romantic, of tragic and tragicomic and melodramatic, of "realism" and "imagination," can be handled best in a course that, while preserving a strong historical perspective, studies literary history along non-segmented lines.

The point of all this is that in the area of literary history the inherent logic of

the subject-matter strongly suggests a modification in the sequence of courses taken by most of our future teachers of English. There is apparently a strong argument for some kind of a capstone course of the synoptic variety, helping the student to formulate, however tentatively, the kind of rationale that can give to his knowledge of literary history coherence and significance. The student following the conventional program usually knows a great deal *about literature*, but he tends to be woefully inarticulate on *what literature is all about*. He shows a discouraging lack of critical self-reliance when confronted with a disturbing new work of literature not yet labeled and classified by the critical establishment. He tends to shun exposure to the rigors of the great primary texts, taking refuge among the secondary sources.

To return to our original theme: In English, at any rate, discussion of the aims and methods of instruction must be closely correlated with our examination of the nature of subject-matter. Only an approach that successfully integrates study of the what and the how has a chance of appearing relevant to the practicing classroom teacher. Our final question then is how work in this direction can be encouraged. It seems to me that the answer lies in support for work that lies just about in the middle between the two familiar extremes: the kind of fragmented or specialized subject-matter research whose relevance to teaching is politely assumed rather than rigorously insisted upon; and the kind of conventional educational research that in "the actual learning situation" behavioristically tests hypotheses whose importance and relevance is dubious to the subject-matter specialist. What is missing between these two extremes is *research into the structure of a discipline*, exploring it as a body of knowledge, traditions, procedures, and attitudes *to be taught*. The central question in this kind of inquiry is: "What, in the present state of my discipline, am I trying to teach?" The investigator would aim to discover in the teacher's subject-matter the underlying principles, the inherent relations, that make it at once *teachable* and *worth teaching*. The astonishing success and influence of Jerome S. Bruner's *The Process of Education* shows that people in a variety of fields are ready to respond to calls for such a program.

Let me give a few concrete examples. In language studies, the sheer pressure of new developments is creating a need for studies that will do for today, and in a more probing and systematic way, what Robert C. Pooley did some years ago in *Teaching English Usage* and *Teaching English Grammar*. The steadily growing interest in composition, and the growing volume of discussion and research about a "new rhetoric," could provide the substance for studies modeled on Albert R. Kitzhaber's *Themes, Theories, and Therapy*, subtitled "The Teaching of Writing in College." In literary studies, the vogue of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* should encourage studies of literary history that are "anatomical" and thematic and synoptic rather than miscellaneous and anecdotal. Such studies would do more than take inventory of content to be covered; they would imply a strategy, a perspective, a method.

Someone who wants to improve instruction in school or college must find things to say that the classroom teacher finds relevant. This is the kind of argument that, as someone said, is as unanswerable as decapitation. One way of enlisting the teacher's interest is to provide him with material that sharpens his understanding of his subject-matter while at the same time illuminating his resources and responsibilities as a teacher.

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